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SUBJECT: WEEKLY MEDIA WRAP-UP: TRIPARTITE SUMMIT ON THE MIDDLE
EAST; BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ; IRAN; AIRBUS WOES. FEBRUARY 16,

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[1](#)2007.

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) The leading international story was the tripartite meeting in Jerusalem between Condoleezza Rice, Mahmoud Abbas and Ehoud Olmert. Media called it a "summit for nothing," achieving only the goal of agreeing to meet again. The announcement from London of the upcoming British troop withdrawal from Iraq prompted commentary throughout the week. Editorials and reports suggested that the announcement is the only way for PM Blair to "halt the drop in his approval ratings" and that the "decision isolates George Bush even further and makes the road ahead even more arduous." With the impending release of the International Atomic Energy Agency report expected to stipulate that Iran has expanded uranium enrichment efforts instead of meeting international demands to halt those efforts, commentaries theorized about the possibility of an American military intervention in Iran. Restructuring at Airbus elicited laments from dailies over fate of the "one of the truly European company." Airbus's plans to cut 10,000 jobs and the pending layoffs are expected to be at the top the agenda during a meeting between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Jacques Chirac on Friday. End Summary.

TRIPARTITE SUMMIT ON THE MIDDLE EAST

[1](#)2. (SBU) On February 20, left-of-center Le Monde reported the Israeli media's characterization of the meeting as the "Blah blah Summit, the Summit of Despair or the Summit for nothing." The daily noted that there "was not even a press conference organized at the close of the meeting... What Secretary Rice had called in January a meeting designed to open the political horizon between the Israelis and Palestinians" was aborted. For Catholic La Croix on February 20, "the expectations for yesterday's meeting in Jerusalem were so low that no one was disappointed by the outcome."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Bernard Guetta on state-run France Inter radio on February 20 discussed what he called the "American intransigence." Guetta told listeners that the only thing to come out of the summit was the promise to meet again. Nonetheless, "in spite of the fact that Hamas is moving in the right direction, Americans continue to refuse to acknowledge this evolution and Europe is incapable of urging it to."

BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ

14. (SBU) On February 21, broadcast media widely reported the UK's intention to begin withdrawing troops from Iraq. State-run France 2 television's morning news report noted that "this is a maneuver for Tony Blair to halt his drop in approval ratings." In his February 21 broadcast, state-run France Inter radio commentator Bernard Guetta praised President Chirac for his decision not to involve France in the intervention in Iraq. "He had a premonition about the consequences of the intervention, that it would tear the country apart, foster terrorism, give Iran more power and generally upset the region... He had the courage... to try to mobilize the world around a refusal to take part in the Iraqi intervention and it is in large part thanks to him that this war did not turn into a clash between Christianity and Islam."

15. (SBU) In the February 22 edition of right-of-center Le Figaro, Pierre Rousselin's editorial, entitled "A Very Political Withdrawal," observed that "Tony Blair, armed with good intentions and a messianic vision like George W. Bush, wanted to convert Iraq and the Middle East to western-style democracy. Four years later, Blair is pulling out of a country that is in the throes of civil war, where the reconstruction effort has never gotten off the ground and where Iran will obviously take advantage of the vacuum left behind by the British troops. George W. Bush, no doubt, tried his best to delay a British troop withdrawal while trying to convince a hostile Congress to approve a troop surge in Iraq. Tony Blair's decision isolates George Bush even further and makes the road ahead even more arduous."

16. (SBU) Left-wing Liberation's report on February 22 suggested that "On the international scene, the UK's image has been damaged... While in the U.S. Tony Blair looks like a hero, leading a country that is perceived to be a trustworthy ally, in his own country as well as in France, Germany and Russia, Blair is seen as the American President's lap dog... Will Blair be forever stigmatized by the

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Iraqi crisis? Probably; and his role in transforming the Labour Party or improving the economic situation in the UK will be minimized."

17. (SBU) In Catholic La Croix on February 22, Francois Ernewein opined that "The real reason for the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq lies not in Iraq but in the UK. Ceaselessly torn between Europe and the other side of the Atlantic, [Tony Blair] made the choice in 2003 to go into Iraq in spite of international law, relaying the [U.S.'s] lies as to the imminent threat posed by Iraq, and in contradiction with the majority of British public opinion. Four years later the situation in Iraq is such that even greater mobilization in terms of troops and materiel is necessary. Instead it is the contrary that Tony Blair has just announced... The downsizing of the coalition is a green light for disaster... But to be an ally of the U.S., to share the same values, to stand together with this great democracy, to hate terrorism does not mean that every action should be approved... This is what the British PM is beginning to understand."

IRAN -- POSSIBLE U.S. MILITARY OFFENSIVE?

18. (SBU) According to right-of-center Le Figaro on February 21, "The Gulf countries are torn between the temptation to see an intervention in Iran in a positive light, and concern that it would destabilize the entire region... Defense Secretary Robert Gates confirmed that all of the deployment in the Gulf is indeed directed at Iran. Not necessarily for imminent military action, but to elicit respect throughout the negotiations."

19. (SBU) On February 22, senior foreign affairs editorialist for right-of-center Le Figaro Renaud Girard explained that "The U.S. cannot launch a military offensive against Iran." Girard argued

that "too many obstacles make a military intervention improbable. These obstacles are as much technical as they are political and diplomatic... In Washington, with the hindsight of Iraq, it is impossible to predict with any precision what a military strike in Iran set off in the region... The UNSC would never approve such a strike. Russia would surely veto... Therefore the deployment of aircraft carriers to the Gulf should be interpreted as gesticulation... It is the stick that is being waved in the hopes that the adversary will go for a reasonable carrot."

¶10. (SBU) On February 21, state-run France Inter radio's Dominique Bromberger told listeners that "nothing seems to be able to prevent an Iranian-American confrontation anymore. Technically it could take place at any moment, but it appears as though the American President has not yet made that decision... But little by little, the measures against Iran that have already been implemented, compounded with the Iranian president's incompetence are slowly beginning to produce a reaction. Iranian public opinion is discontent... So it seems possible that if the powers involved in the negotiations could tighten the screws another turn on the Iranian regime, it could obtain results."

AIRBUS WOES

¶11. (SBU) The editorial in right-of-center Le Figaro by Gaetan de Capele on February 20 claimed that there is "no doubt about it, the new crisis at Airbus... is extremely serious. Beyond the umpteenth conflict between the European partners who are paralyzed by economic patriotism... It is the future of the one of the truly European companies that is at stake." Also on February 20, Catholic La Croix noted that "Airbus' turbulence has been salutary for Boeing."

¶12. (SBU) For centrist business daily La Tribune on February 20, the crisis at Airbus mostly pointed to the "weaknesses of the French side" of the company. The editorial by Francois-Xavier Pietri entitled "Power Flop" laments how "poorly Europe is doing, not just politically but in business circles as well... The Airbus issue is turning into a fiasco, at least when looked at from the Franco-German angle... In the past, Bercy and Matignon have been much more involved in Airbus' fate... This is because the interests of the presidential election, only two months away, do not necessarily coincide with those of the long term prospects of was once the pride of European industry."

¶13. (SBU) Left-of-center Le Monde's unsigned editorial on February 21 said that the "Crisis at Airbus is taking a turn for the worse -- it is becoming nationalistic... And yet Airbus is a good company. The technology is good, its commercial organizational set-up is good, and its planes are good, in particular the A380. Europe does

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not have that many commercial successes under its belt that it can afford to leave Airbus in the dust faced with Boeing... Airbus's problem has to do with costs. The 'Power 8' plan is painful, with some 10,000 layoffs planned, but it is necessary... If the company wants to continue to play in the same category as Boeing, it will have to change its industrial and capitalistic model. It will have to give up the two-way Franco-German command which has demonstrated the extent to which it is paralyzing." On February 21, PM Villepin confirmed on RTL radio the "Power 8" plan for Airbus including some 10,000 layoffs.

STAPLETON